

Name: _____

Date: _____

World History

Reading 4.8—Njinga of Ndongo

Directions: Read these excerpts from UNESCO's unit on Njinga of Ndongo. As you do, extract details about Njinga's life and rule. Use these details to help you craft a 12 line poem about Njinga.

Evidence from the article about Njinga's life and rule.

2 Biography

Njinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba

Njinga Mbandi (1581–1663), Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, defined much of the history of seventeenth-century Angola. The Europeans' mercantilist designs, in particular the development of the slave trade along the southern African coast, drastically changed the political, social, economic and cultural environment of the Kingdom of Ndongo and the entire region. It was against that backdrop that Njinga Mbandi made her mark as an outstanding example of female governance.

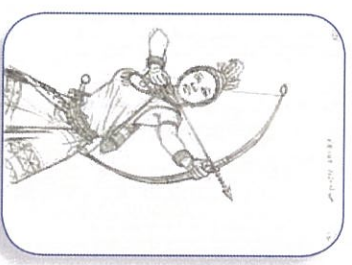
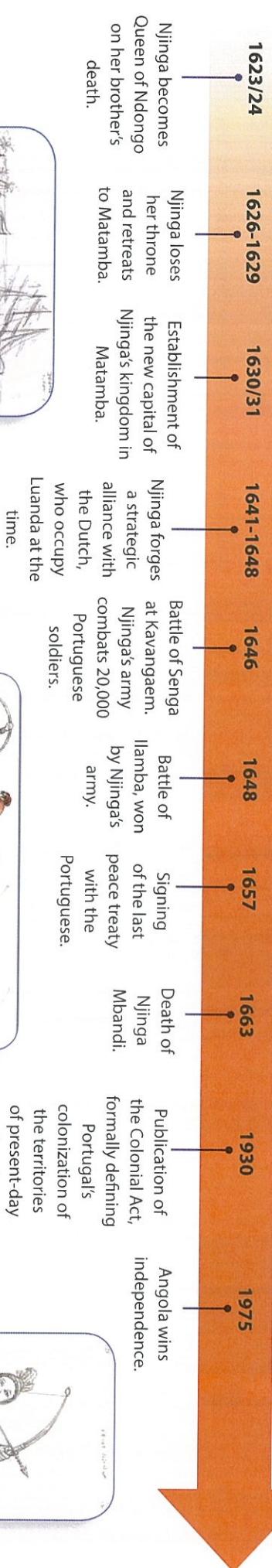
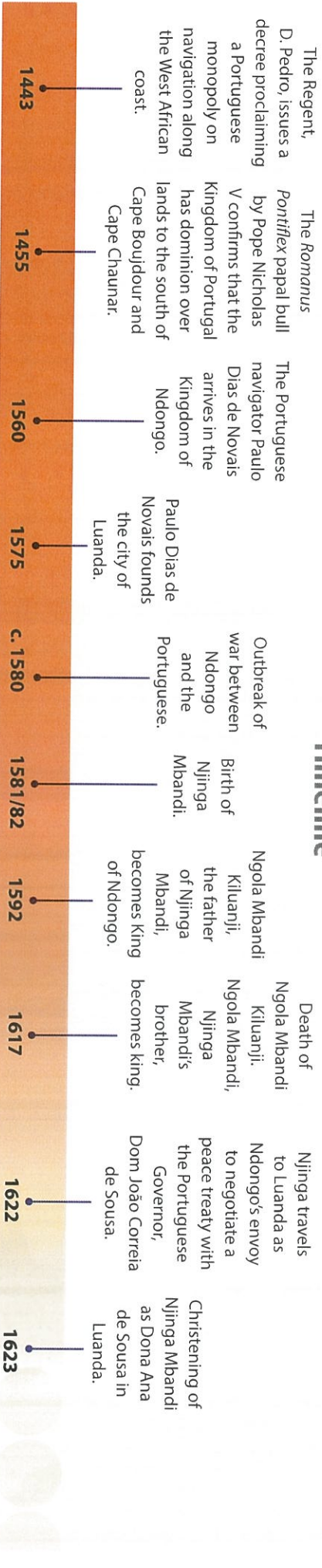
Ngola Mbandi Kiluanji, the King of Ndongo, died in 1617. His son, Ngola Mbandi, became the new king but he had neither his father's charisma nor the intelligence of his sister Njinga Mbandi. In 1622, harried by the Portuguese, he sent Njinga Mbandi to Luanda as his envoy to negotiate for peace with Dom João Correia de Sousa, the Portuguese Governor. Njinga proved to be an outstanding negotiator and diplomat.

In 1624, Ngola Mbandi died. Njinga took power and became queen. She quickly distinguished herself as an excellent sovereign. Her tactics in warfare and espionage, her diplomatic skills, her ability to forge numerous strategic alliances, and her knowledge of trade and religious issues served her well in tenaciously resisting Portugal's colonialist aspirations until her death in 1663.



Statue of Njinga Mbandi, Luanda,
Republic of Angola.
Photograph by Erik Cleves Kristensen, 2006.

Timeline



Njinga Mbandi – Biography

1. Historical background: the Portuguese in Ndongo and resistance

Introduction

The arrival of the Portuguese in Ndongo in the late sixteenth century profoundly disrupted the local situation. The wars of conquest, the development of the slave trade and the emergence of new economic markets transformed the political, social, economic and cultural landscape of the region.

It was against a backdrop of resistance that Njinga Mbandi became renowned as an outstanding example of female governance in the history of Africa.

1.1 Local kingdoms

In the sixteenth century, central Africa consisted of different kingdoms, above all the great Kingdom of Kongo, but there were also smaller kingdoms such as Ndongo and Matamba, over which the Kingdom of Kongo slowly lost influence.

At the time, it was relatively common for these political entities to be organized along political and geographic lines, based on centralized power and intermediate tiers known – in Ndongo, for instance – as chieftains (*sobas*).



Portuguese caravels.
Painting by King Frederic Leonard, 1934-1935.

Owing to trade among the kingdoms, complementary products moved primarily between coastal and inland areas. Those commodities were, in particular, iron, ivory, fabrics, salt and foodstuffs such as fish, animals, and other farm produce.

In Ndongo, centralized power was traditionally passed on by lineage and situated in the interior, at the crossing of trade routes, in order to ensure widespread control.

1.2 Slave trade

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese and the Spanish launched major expeditions to conquer new lands, thus extending their political influence and developing trade links. The Dutch, French and English followed suit one century later.

Portugal's mercantilist venture, especially its large-scale slave-trading operations in Luanda, had a great impact on the local peoples and kingdoms from the late sixteenth century onwards.

In Angola, the slave trade continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. Millions of children, women and men, who had either been rounded up or were victims of wars, raids or local trading, were shipped to Brazil, Central America and Portugal. In addition, Portugal's determination to extend its control over the country gave rise to conflicts, resistance and the interplay of political alliances, either between the invaders and local rulers, or among various local rulers themselves.



Map of the Kingdoms of Congo, Angola, and Benguela.
Map from the David Rumsey Map Collection.

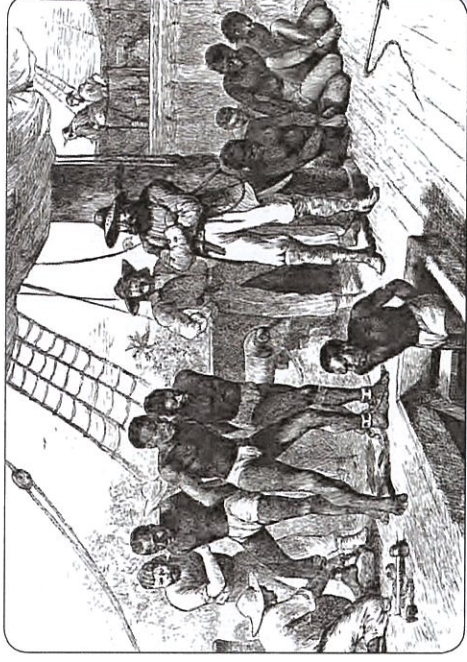
1.3 Ndongo cornered by the Portuguese

In 1575, the Portuguese navigator and conqueror Paulo Dias de Novais founded the port city of São Paulo da Assunção de Loanda, now the city of Luanda. From 1580 onwards, the Portuguese stepped up their slave-trading activities, declared war on Ndongo and sought to conquer the whole country.

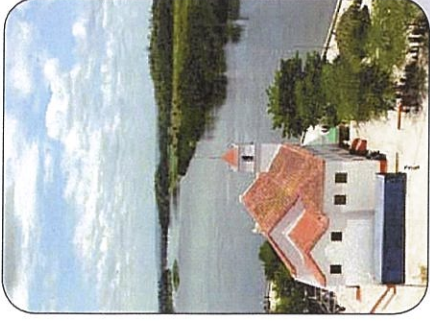
They advanced by stages into the interior, from forts built along the Kwanza River. The construction of Fort Ambaca (1611) took them close to Kabasa, the capital of Ndongo, situated some 250 kilometres from the coast. Decade after decade, successive sovereigns of Ndongo resisted their advance, but were eventually forced to yield before the firepower of the Portuguese and the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Portuguese Crown.

Successive sovereigns of Ndongo from 1575 to 1663:

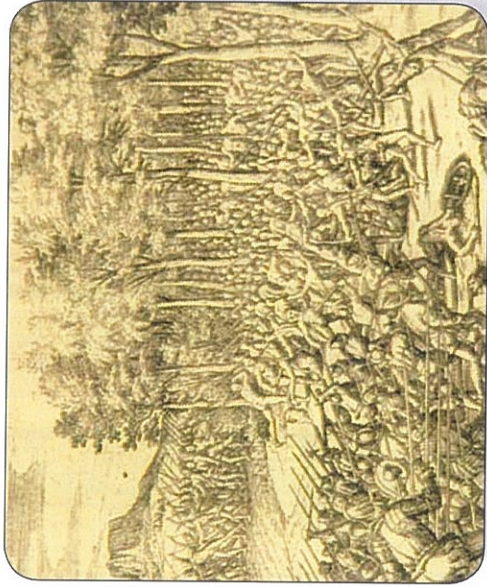
Njinga Ngola Kilombo Kia Kasenda	(1575, 1592)
Ngola Mbandi Kiluanji	(1592, 1617)
Ngola Mbandi	(1617, 1623)
Njinga Mbandi	(1623, 1663)



Slaves being loaded onto a European slaving ship.
Illustration from the UNESCO General History of Africa.



The Kwanza River and the church
Nossa Senhora da Conceição, built
by the Portuguese at the end of
the Sixteenth century.
Photograph by Paulo Cesar
Santos, 2009.



The resistance of the African kingdoms against the Europeans.
Illustration from the UNESCO General History of Africa.

1.4 Resistance

Ndongo's resistance, epitomized by Njinga Mbandi in particular, slowed down Portuguese plans. The Queen relied not only on her skills in warfare, guerrilla methods and her tactics in the field of espionage, but also on her tremendous ability as a negotiator.

Sent to Luanda as an envoy by her brother Ngola Mbandi in 1622, Njinga succeeded in negotiating peace with the Portuguese governor. After her brother's death, Njinga became Queen and tenaciously resisted the Portuguese until her death in 1663.

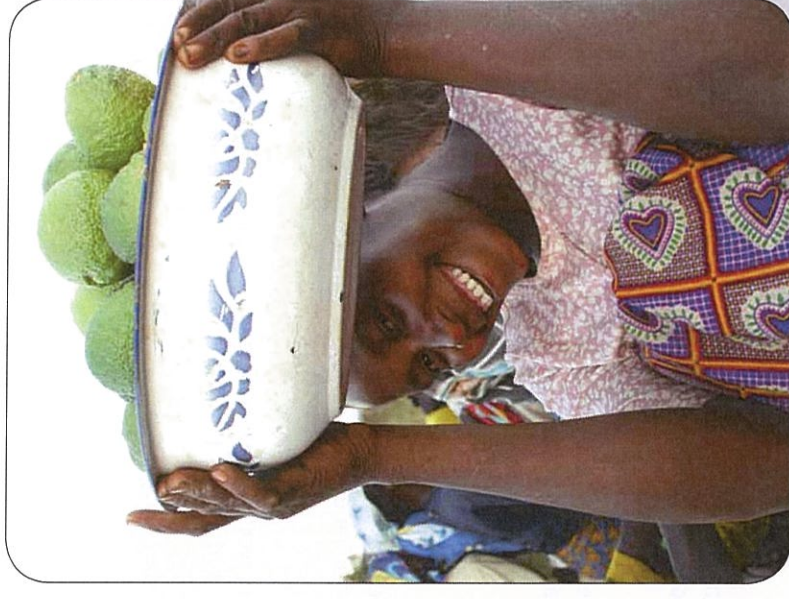
In spite of numerous attempts to capture her, Njinga thwarted every plot. After her death, the Portuguese occupation was extended deep into the interior of the continent in order to supply slaves to the slave-trading posts, with 7,000 soldiers from Njinga's army being shipped to Brazil as slaves.

1.5 Emergence of a regional political figure

For several decades, Njinga forged many strategic alliances with the neighbouring kingdoms (Kongo, Kassanje and Kissama), negotiated with the Portuguese and the Dutch, and protected people who had taken refuge in her kingdom. She asserted her authority over entire peoples in some instances. She emerged gradually as a powerful political figure in the region and a force to be reckoned with, often feared and never subdued.

Njinga therefore never accepted the loss of Ndongo. Even after fleeing to Matamba, which she had seized, she signed her correspondence with the title Njinga Mbandi Ngola, in other words, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba. As she considered herself to be queen of both kingdoms, she was also known as the “double Queen”.

By authorizing the slave trade between the Kingdom of Matamba and Luanda, she allowed a variety of commercial goods to flow between the two regions (domestic animals, fish, textile fibres, palm oil and palm wine), thus contributing to the formation of kitandas, popular markets of economic and social importance in which women played a key role.



A Zungueira (an Angolan hawker), Luanda, Republic of Angola.
Photograph by Gilson Oliveira , 2011.



2. Outstanding governance by a woman

Introduction

Njinga played a decisive role in the history of her country and was the catalyst of a genuinely socio-political and cultural revolution. As such, she has been a source of inspiration for African women for hundreds of years.

She is known throughout Africa for her intelligence, her political and diplomatic wisdom, and her flair as a military tactician – and as an exceptional woman and a key historical figure.

2.1 A cultivated woman of letters

Queen Njinga was an educated, cultivated woman. She spoke her native language as well as the language of the Portuguese with whom she had to deal. She wrote her own letters to the Portuguese kings João IV and Alfonso VI and to their governors in Luanda.

Her education, intelligence and command of languages were key assets throughout her life, enabling her to adapt to the most complicated political situations and to turn them to her own advantage. Besides knowing the peoples with whom she was obliged to negotiate, she knew the Portuguese's culture and language, owing to contact in her childhood with the first missionaries and merchants to visit Ndongo.



2.2 An outstanding strategist and diplomat

A dexterous diplomat, she negotiated with the Dutch and the Portuguese to preserve her kingdom's territorial integrity.

Demonstrating extraordinary talent as a strategist, she sent spies regularly to Luanda in order to thwart colonial projects. Their particular mission was to wait for reinforcements to arrive from Lisbon and to study the training methods used by the conquistadors. Njinga thus familiarized her army with Portuguese fighting techniques.

As she preferred guerrilla tactics, her army attacked at night to catch the enemy unaware. In thirty years of warfare, she evaded all traps laid to capture her.

Furthermore, she had a perfect grasp of religious and trade issues. She often used the promise that the Ndongo peoples would convert to Christianity as a bargaining method with the Portuguese. She herself agreed to be christened during a visit to Luanda in 1623.

2.3 A role model for women

Her deeds and strength of character inspired great resistance leaders of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) throughout the struggle for independence, in particular: Deolinda Rodrigues, Irene Engracia, Vastok Inga, Mambo Café, Roth Gil and Rita Tomas.

Njinga is a leadership role model for all generations of Angolan women. Women in Angola today display remarkable social independence and are found in the country's army, police force, government, and public and private economic sectors.



3. Njinga, an inexhaustible source of inspiration

Introduction

Since her outmanoeuvring of the Governor, João Correia de Sousa, during the 1622 peace-treaty negotiations in Luanda, the “double Queen” has been acknowledged as an enduring source of inspiration.

Her charisma and the complexity of her personality unfailingly fascinated the missionaries with whom she came into contact, but have also fascinated authors in Europe, Africa and Brazil and, more generally, artists in all countries. Moreover, Njinga has inspired the religious rites of people of African descent throughout the world.

3.1 Plural and symbolic identities

Njinga’s name is written in a variety of ways, partly on account of orthographic issues arising from the transcription of the Kimbundu language, but also because the Queen herself used different names to sign her letters. Among the following names (a non-exhaustive list), the last were given to her when she converted to Catholicism in Luanda in 1623: Njinga Mbande, Njinga Mbandi, Jinga, Singa, Zingua, Ginga, Njingha, Ana Njinga, Ngola Njinga, Njinga of Matamba, Zinga, Zingua, Mbande Ana Njinga, Ann Njinga and Dona Ana de Sousa.

In Portuguese, the verb *gingar* denotes a movement of the body. Used figuratively, the verb conveys the idea of flexibility in the face of obstacles, especially during negotiations, in reference to Queen Njinga.



Illustration of
Njinga Mbandi
by the French
illustrator Achille
Devéria, 1830.



An Angolan teacher, Luanda, Republic of Angola.
Photograph by David Blumenkrantz, 2010.

3.2 Njinga in the arts in past centuries

In 1687, in a book dedicated to the “double Queen”, the Italian priest Cavazzi described the famous 1622 meeting in Luanda between Njinga and Correia de Sousa, the Portuguese Governor, at which a peace treaty was negotiated. When the Queen arrived in the reception room, the governor did not offer her a chair on which to sit. Stung by this action, she ordered one of her servants to crouch on all fours to make a seat for her, thus subtly suggesting that she had come to negotiate on an equal footing. This act inspired the priest Cavazzi to capture the scene in a now famous painting.

In 1769, the French author Jean-Louis Castilhon published *Zingha, Reine d'Angola* [Njinga, Queen of Angola], the first historical novel to be written on Africa from an anti-colonialist standpoint. The novel, depicting the queen as a rich, paradoxical and complex character, caused quite a stir.

In 1830, Achille Devéria, the French illustrator, fired by enthusiasm after reading portrayals of the Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, decided to draw her portrait. His imaginary depiction of Njinga was widely accepted in Europe as the official portrait of Queen Njinga.

3.3 Njinga in the arts today

Njinga has inspired many authors and artists in recent times. The following are but a few examples:

In 1960, Agostinho Neto wrote the poem *O Içar da Bandeira* [Raising the Banner] in tribute to the Angolan people's heroes, with reference to Njinga.

In 1975, Manuel Pedro Pacavira published the novel *Njinga Mbandi*.

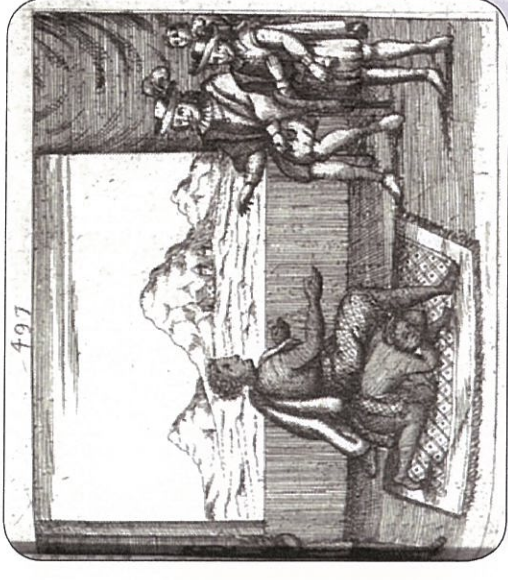
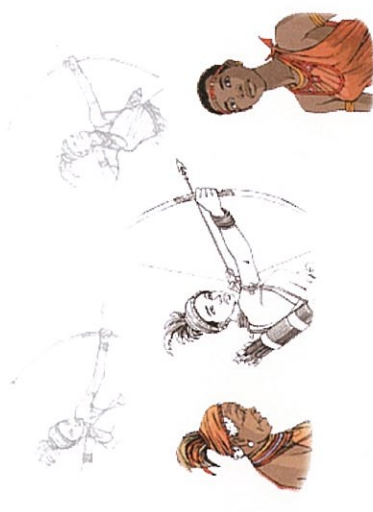


Illustration extracted from the book *Njinga, Reine d'Angola. La Relation d'Antonio Cavazzi de Montecuccolo* presenting the negotiation between Njinga Mbandi and the vice-king of Portugal in Luanda, in 1622.



Njinga Mbandi – Pedagogical Unit

